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NEWS RELEASE

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Terre Haute Felon Sentenced to 15 Years in Prison for Possessing a Firearm With Obliterated Serial Number

Urbana, IL- Chief U.S. District Judge Michael P. McCuskey sentenced a Terre Haute, Indiana, man to fifteen years in prison for unlawfully possessing a firearm, as announced by Rodger A. Heaton, United States Attorney for the Central District of Illinois. James Ray Piker, age 63, of Terre Haute, Indiana was sentenced in federal court in Urbana on January 19, 2007.

Piker was arrested on March 1, 2004, following a traffic stop by an officer with the Paris, Illinois, Police Department. During an inventory search of the pick up truck driven by Piker, Paris police officers discovered a loaded 45 mm. semi-automatic handgun with an obliterated serial number and ammunition near the driver seat of the truck.

Individuals with felony convictions are prohibited from possessing a firearm. Piker has previous convictions of at least three drug trafficking offenses or violent felonies, including burglary, escape from a prison camp, transportation of a dangerous drug for sale and manufacture of a controlled substance. Therefore Piker was subject to a term of federal imprisonment ranging from a minimum term of 15 years to a term of life imprisonment. In a negotiated plea agreement accepted by Judge McCuskey, Piker and the U.S. Attorney's office agreed to a term of 15 years of imprisonment in the Federal Bureau of Prisons stemming from this charge. Following his release from federal prison, Piker will be placed on three years of supervised release.

The case was prosecuted under Project Safe Neighborhoods, an ongoing Department of Justice initiative that targets illegal possession of firearms by convicted felons to reduce violent crime. Assistant U.S. Attorney David H. Hoff prosecuted the case, which was investigated by the Paris, Illinois, Police Department and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF).

Piker pled guilty to the charge on October 16, 2006. Following Friday's court hearing, Piker remained in the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service for transfer to the federal Bureau of Prisons.

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